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Introduction

It has always being a fact that adults can learn, but it was until the twentieth century that attention was paid to adult education. One of the earliest researches on adult learning was conducted by behavioral psychologists. These early studies conducted with a curiosity to know how ageing affected learning process.

However, by the mid-twentieth century interest in adult learners from a humanistic psychology perspective focused more on how adult¬hood could be distinguished from childhood learning. A humanistic per¬spective on learning emphasizes personal growth and development rather than the more mechanistic change in behavior. And it was this research and writing on adult learning that resulted in adult education becom¬ing a recognized field of practice with its own professional associations, journals, and conferences. The three major "foundational" theories of adult learning that emerged during this time—andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning—are firmly lodged in humanistic learning theory. Each theory or framework is associated with an adult educator who wanted to define what is characteristic of the learning of adults versus that of children. Each theory has a robust research base and has, for the most part, withstood the test of time. (Merriam 2014).

Adults are discerning in what they want to learn, they are more questioning and subjective about what they want to learn. They want to see the benefits of partaking in a programme, this is why there are learning theories to help direct learning. It is important to remember that adult learners are not simply chronologically adults. They have expectations and motivations that differ from their younger counterparts.
Adults learn best by practice and experience. They are more interested in practicing what they have been taught then memorizing or even taking an exam. Adult learners are goal oriented and hence can be demanding and need to know what their education will do to help them meet their goals. It is important to provide several ways to show expertise on a topic that allows the learner to know and note which one best meets their learning needs and goals. There is need to show respect for learners' previous knowledge and experiences this helps to create a positive learning environment. Facilitators who approach classes with the view that they may learn as well help to create such an environment. Although the facilitator may have mastery of a given topic, they can often learn from engaging in discussion with their adult learners.

Adult learners are problem-oriented in their learning hence Problem-based education is well suited for adults, helping them to develop important skills they can translate into professional practice.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theories gives an understanding of how adults learn, and helps facilitators to be more effective in their practice and able to respond better to the needs of the learners. There is no theory that can be said to be the best or that can be applicable to all adult learners. The fact is the more the adult facilitator understands this it will help him or her to be more effective in relating with adult learners and meeting the learning needs they bring forward. Adult learning theory reveals the fact that adults have unique qualities that make them different from younger learners.

Adult learning theory is based on four key principles and five key assumptions.

Key Principles of Adult Learning

1. Involvement in Learning: Adults want to be involved in the planning, delivery, and execution of their learning.
2. Accessing Past Experiences: Adults possess a wealth of experiences to help them understand new information.
3. Problem Solving: Adults want to solve problems and apply reasoning.
4. Immediacy: Adults want to be able to apply information immediately.

Key Assumptions of Adult Learning

1. Self-concept: Adults are more independent and self-directed.
2. Experience: Adults have prior experience from which they draw knowledge.
3. Readiness to Learn: Adults need a reason for learning and are goal oriented.
4. Orientation of Learning: Adults want to be able to apply information to their lives and are less interested in general learning on a topic.
5. Motivation to Learn: Adults are intrinsically motivated to learn, wanting to improve themselves rather than learn because of others.
(*https://www.teachingandlearningnetwork.com/adult-learners.html*)

According to Merriam (2014), the three foundational adult learning theories are;

1. Andragogy
2. Self-directed learning
3. Transformative learning

<u>**Andragogy**</u>: Andragogy in Europe and was introduced to USA by Malcolm Knowles in the late 1960s. He introduced it as a technology for understanding the difference between pedagogy which is how children learn from andragogy which is an understanding of how adults learn.

These are principles of an adult learner:

• Moves from dependency to increasing self-directedness as he/she matures and can direct his/her own learning: As an adult facilitator I have had my fair share of this attribute. Adults who are total illiterate and have no knowledge of western education usually seem very dependent at the beginning stage, but as soon as they have gained some level of understanding and can relate it to their everyday life, they begin to direct the learning and tell me aspect that are important to them and with time to begin to specialize on an aspect that is important to them.

• Draws on his/her accumulated reservoir of life experiences to aid learning: To a large extent especially in Nigeria, culture and religion forms experience, to successfully teach adult learners the facilitator must be willing acknowledge their believe system and culture and respect their religious beliefs. Any knowledge that negates culture and religion is seen as a threat to their thought pattern.

• Is ready to learn when he/she assumes new social or life roles: As long as an adult learner sees benefit in a programme, there's an intrinsic motivation to learn. In my class i have learners give sacrifice in terms of making out time for classes, giving their resources even when it is not convenient because they have seen how useful the class is to them especially in their work and business space

• Is problem-centered and wants to apply new learning immediately; and

• Is motivated to learn by internal, rather than external, factors.

These are implications for practice suggested by Knowles, for adult educators

• Set a cooperative climate for learning in the class-room;

• Assess the learner's specific needs and interests;

• Develop learning objectives based on the learner's needs, interests, and skill levels;

- Design sequential activities to achieve the objectives;

- Work collaboratively with the learner to select methods, materials, and resources for instruction; and

- Evaluate the quality of the learning experience and make adjustments, as needed, while assessing needs for further learning. (Meriam 2014).

According to Cevero (2001), because adults need to know why they are learning something, effective teachers explain their reasons for teaching specific skills. Because adults learn by doing, effective instruction focuses on tasks that adults can perform, rather than on memorization of content. Because adults are problem-solvers and learn best when the subject is of immediate use, effective instruction involves the learner in solving real-life problems.

Andragogy is not without criticism. Brookfield (2014), called the theory "culture blind," stating that the concept of self-directed learning and the concept of the student's establishing a non-threatening relationship with the teacher as facilitator of learning may neglect races and cultures that value the teacher as the primary source of knowledge and direction.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning (SDL), is a second major adult learning theory, which has helped to show the differences between adult learners and children.

According to Meriam (2014), Tough's researched into the self-planned learning projects of Canadian adult learners and he found that 90% of his partici¬pants had engaged in an average of 100 hours of self-planned learning projects the previous year, and that this learning was deeply embedded in their everyday lives. Over 45 years of research in North America and Europe has substantiated that most adults are engaged in self-directed learning projects, that this learning occurs as part of everyday life, is undertaken in a systematic way, yet is not dependent upon an instructor or a classroom. Self-directed learning states that the learner is in control of his or her own learning. This is an effective way for adults to learn because they always have motive for coming for a lesson, so they are the best decision makers as regards learning, The facilitator can only suggest but cannot impose learning system. The learner makes decisions about content, resources, methods, accessment and evaluation of the learning. They determine their needs, goals, resources and implement a plan to meet these needs For instance, I have several adult learners in my literacy lessons, they come with different motives, some already can read very well but have some difficulty spelling so they come to enhance their ability in spelling, some have never been to school and hence want to know everything from scratch, whereas others come for the class to be able to speak in the right pronunciation. With these varieties of learning needs only the adult learner is in the best position to direct learning. Another example is that a learner wants to take a class, find a mentor, or join an online discussion group. SDL can be found throughout the contexts of adult life, including the workplace, continuing professional education, health and medical fields, higher education, and in online contexts where research suggests that the more successful online learners are also more self-directed (Merriam 2014).

One of the advantages, of self-directed learning is that it can be easily added into daily routines and at the learners convenience in flow with their preferences. It can include interacting with peers, experts and getting information on the internet. For instance, I am a PhD student studying in Atlantic International University, the learning is self-directed, I choose my courses myself and I have an option to take up optional courses, which is not compulsory, when I need help I have tutor to reach out to and the

school's customer client officer who is doing such an amazing job. The school has an online library where I can source for information and get all the details I want. The entire process of learning gives me a kind of fulfillment knowing I am satisfying a learning need.

The problem with self-directed learning is that it can be difficult for adults who do lack independence, who are not swift with the internet, who are not good with socializing and who lack enough literacy skills. Initially when I started self-directed I was expecting to be taught, it took me about two weeks to understand how the system works and I think I am having a great time learning what I know is best for me. So in a situation whereby the adult is not used to been self-directed, the facilitator has a duty to be patient enough to guide the learner till he or she has begun to show a level of learning independence. There is need for encouragement, still using myself as an examples, when I started the PhD programme, initially I was getting really anxious because I wasn't understanding the system and how it works but the customer service officer and my tutor were always available, they didn't only guide me, but the encouragement was amazing, I got motivational quotes and they were so helpful. One time my course adviser called to ask me if I had any difficulty and encouraged me. Although I am apart from these people even from a distance, I became motivated beyond self motivation. I was initially confused on the courses to choose from but the tutor guided me and gave me objectives of each course so it helped me make the right decisions. When an adult learner is experiencing this difficulty it is important to patiently guide them, help them understand the objectives of every course and encourage them till they are motivated.

Transformative Learning

Of the three foundational theories of adult learning, transformative learning is the most recent and most written about. Instead of focusing on the adult learner's characteristics as andragogy and to a large extent self-directed learning do, transformative learning focuses on the cogni¬tive process of meaning making. This type of learning is considered an adult learning theory because transformative learning is dependent on adult life experiences and a more mature level of cognitive function¬ing than found in childhood. (Meriam, 2014)

In similar vein, Mezirow (2000), listed ten-step transformational learning process which still frames much of today's research. The process is usually initiated through a sudden or dramatic experience (a "disorienting dilemma" in Mezirow's term) wherein adults are challenged to examine their assump¬tions and beliefs that have guided meaning making in the past, but now are no longer adequate. From an examination of current beliefs, the learner moves to exploring new ways of dealing with the dilemma which may lead to a change in a belief, attitude, or an entire perspective. The new perspective is more inclusive and accommodating of a wider range of experiences than the previously-held perspective. Mezirow, who studied the experiences of women returning to college, is considered the main architect of this theory though since his early contribution many frameworks, definitions, and theories have been proposed. Learning in adulthood is often more than just adding information. It is also making sense of our experience and can result in a change in a belief, attitude, or perspective. A perspective transformation is central to this type of learning. While Mezirow fo¬cused on personal, individual transformation, he readily acknowledged the influence of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. He wrote of the need for transformational learning to address oppression and bring about social change.

Transformative learning is a learning that changes the way a person thinks about themselves and their world. In my opinion learning is not complete if it does not bring about a change. According to King (2000), English language learners often report a shift in their view of U.S. culture and in their view of themselves as they gain confidence in communicating in a new language.

In Africa, some strict beliefs and values that stemmed from culture and religion began to give way with education, for instance the killing of twins, restriction of women from attaining western education, female child circumstition, slave trade, superstition, Etc.

Paolo Freire, taught Brazilian workers to read by engaging them, through a problem-posing instructional approach, in discussions about working condi -tions and poor compensation, thereby helping them change their thinking and strive for social change. To Freire, transformative learning is emancipating. (Mezirow, 2000)

Adult facilitators can assist adult learners in transformative learning by:

- **Create a learning environment that is conducive and that supports transformative learning.** Taylor (2000) suggests that teachers need to be "trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrative of high integrity". Adult learners should be provided with feedbacks that are helpful. There is need for learning activities that promotes students interest, interest, participation and collaboration.

- **Know your students and their learning interest.** Cranton (2000) suggests that "thinking types" who enjoy logic will appreciate "case studies, debates, criti-cal questioning, and analyses of theoretical pers-pectives". Those who shy away from speaking publicly will be more comfortable working in a team where they give contributions and not have to be the sole speaker whereas outspoken learners would be so excited to be the team lead and do the presentations. There are learners who would rather be by themselves and study in a calmer atmosphere.

- **Create learning activities that shows different points of view**. Cranton (2002) suggests using films and short stories. She also suggests having students en-gage in journal writing to engage in self-reflection. The teacher can ask a learner to write a brief autobiographical essay and then ask other students to review and reflect on the writer's assumptions. Each student can take a turn at writing his/her autobiographical essay. Another technique is to use critical incidents to engage in reflective discourse, in which learners reflect on an experience, either good or bad, and analyze their assumptions and various perspectives. When the teacher writes and shares as an equal, an atmosphere of trust and openness is fostered.

Other Learning Theories that can be Adopted in Adult Education

Here are other adult learning theories as noted by Rothwell (2008).

1. Functionalistic Theories of Learning propounded by Edward Thorndike, BF Skinner. This is a system whereby biological organisms adapt to their environment through learning. This can be achieved with adult learners by encouraging them, rewarding their efforts, creating a comfortable learning environment.

2. Associationistic Theories of Learning propounded by Pavlov, Edwin Guthrie, William Estes. The theory states that the world seen in the ways people associate stimuli. This also means that people tend to remember an event when they see a familiarity with their present state. This theory implies that practice is an effective way to build skill, different cues helps people unlearn what they have previously learned, if the learning environment have enough cues and familiarity it will speed up learning. For instance an adult learner who wants to enhance their literacy skills, it is just perfect to get words that are likely to be commonly used in the person's work place, business place, Etc. it will aid learning faster because since they have heard these words before they can easily link the words.

3. Cognitive Theories of Learning propounded by Edward Tolman, Albert Bandura, Donald Norman. This theory focuses on cognition, the process of knowing
   - Encourage learner intuition
   - Organize instruction around pictures of the whole
   - Provide learners with cognitive maps by taking steps to try and understand how people understand the big picture
   - Guide learners to watch those who are successful at performing observable tasks to encourage social learning
   - Use behavioral modeling to encourage social learning
   - Encourage learners to try out what they are learning by doing behavioral rehearsals. (Rothwell 2008).

4. Constructivist Theories of Learning Piaget. The focus is how learners internalize what they have learned. Learners do not just passively take in information but it is added to a foundation of previous knowledge. For instance, if I before I teach my adult learners 3 letter words I must have taught them 2 letter words so they use this the knowledge from 2 letter words to get 3 letter words. In using this

theory it is important that the facilitator have proper background before introducing new topics, topics must start from simple to complex, curriculum must be properly organized.

Conclusion/Suggestion

In order to teach adults effectively it is important that the various theories of how adults learn are adequately applied in a balanced way. Adult learners need to be built in such a way that they can become independent learners and whatever they learn can be practiced and most importantly learning without a change is not learning after all. The greatest evaluation of any adult education programme is that there is a change in the adult learner.

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